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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
125
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BAREFOOT
4 OF 5
HIROAKI SAMURA
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by **DANA LEWIS**
lettering and retouch by **TOMOKO SAITO**
cover colors by **RYAN HILL**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* which was destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*.

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, serving the shogun and seeking the secret of immortality.

DŌA

A small, brash Ittō-*ryū* warrior, quick on her feet and eager to brawl.

ISAKU

Dōa's trusted body-guard, a hefty Ittō-*ryū* warrior recently imprisoned for a street fight Dōa started.

BURANDO

Deranged doctor and pioneer in *kessen-chu* transference.

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Imprisoned in an underground cell beneath Edo Castle, Manji is an unwilling participant in Habaki Kagimura's "immortality experiments." Kagimura's unconventional lead doctor, Burando, is finally released from his own stay in prison, and he returns to the experiments with renewed vigor—and seeming quite insane. In order to deter any emotional attachment for the doomed inmates that he works on, he orders that they all wear crude otter masks. Exhausted and frustrated after spying on Kagimura and Edo Castle for too long, Rin and Dōa finally stumble across a mountain of dead bodies that the "immortality experiments" are churning out. In a fit of anger, Dōa rushes to kill an innocent beggar who is wearing some of Isaku's body armor, and Rin finally reveals that she knows about Dōa's Itto-*ryū* affiliation.

designer **SCOTT COOK** editorial assistant **RYAN JORGENSEN**
editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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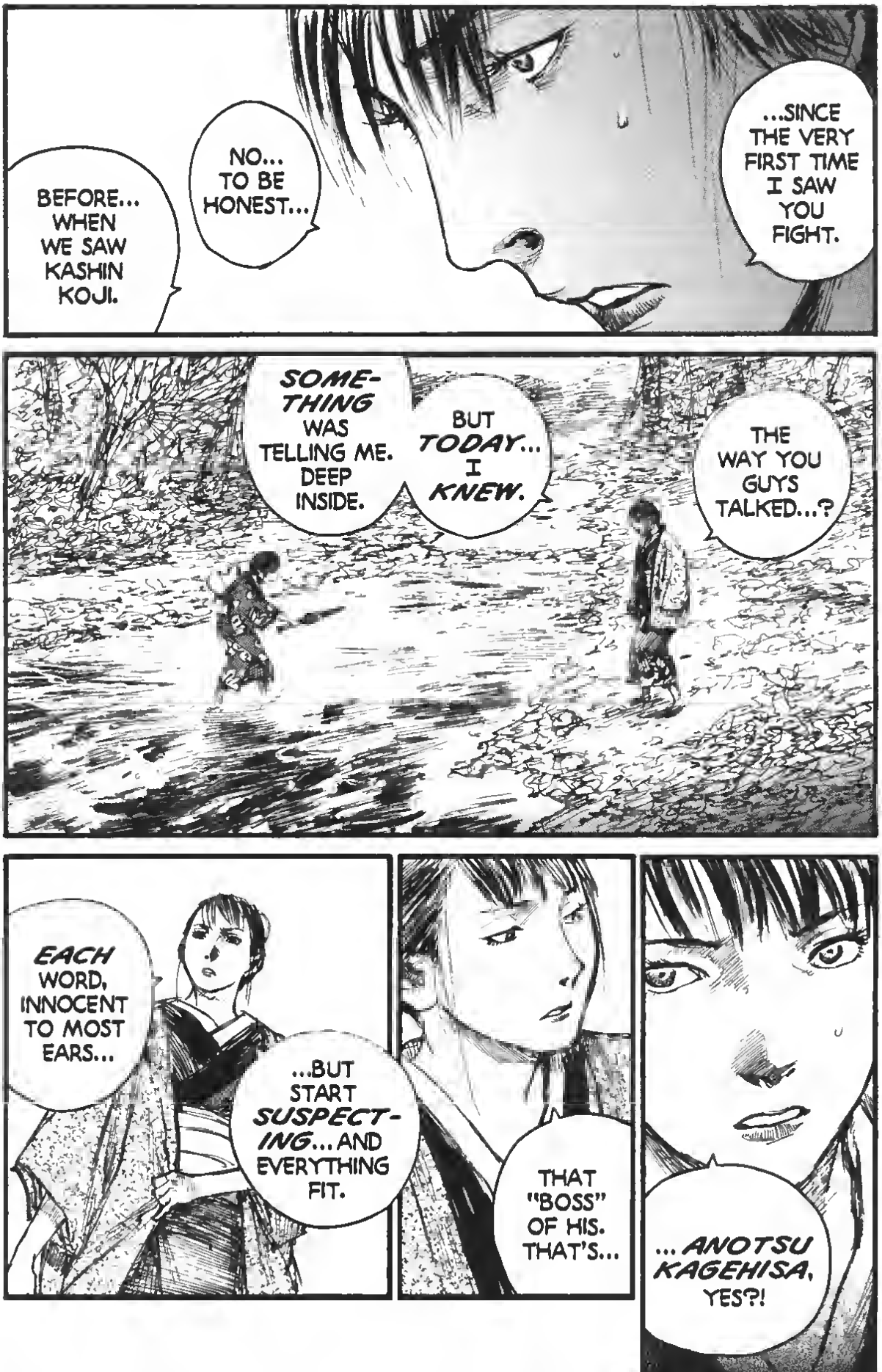
無限の住人

BAREFOOT
-part four-

HOW DID YOU KNOW...?!
DŌA...
SO... IT'S TRUE.
HOW'D YOU KNOW ?!

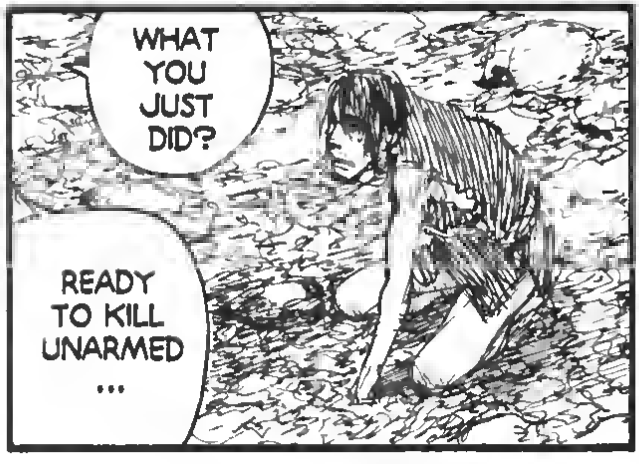

BEFORE... WHEN WE SAW KASHIN KOJI.
NO... TO BE HONEST...
...SINCE THE VERY FIRST TIME I SAW YOU FIGHT.
SOME-THING WAS TELLING ME. DEEP INSIDE.
BUT TODAY... I KNEW.
THE WAY YOU GUYS TALKED...?
EACH WORD, INNOCENT TO MOST EARS...
...BUT START SUSPECT-ING... AND EVERYTHING FIT.
THAT "BOSS" OF HIS. THAT'S...
...ANOTSU KAGEHISA, YES?!

...RIN...!
YOU *ADORE* HIM, DON'T YOU?

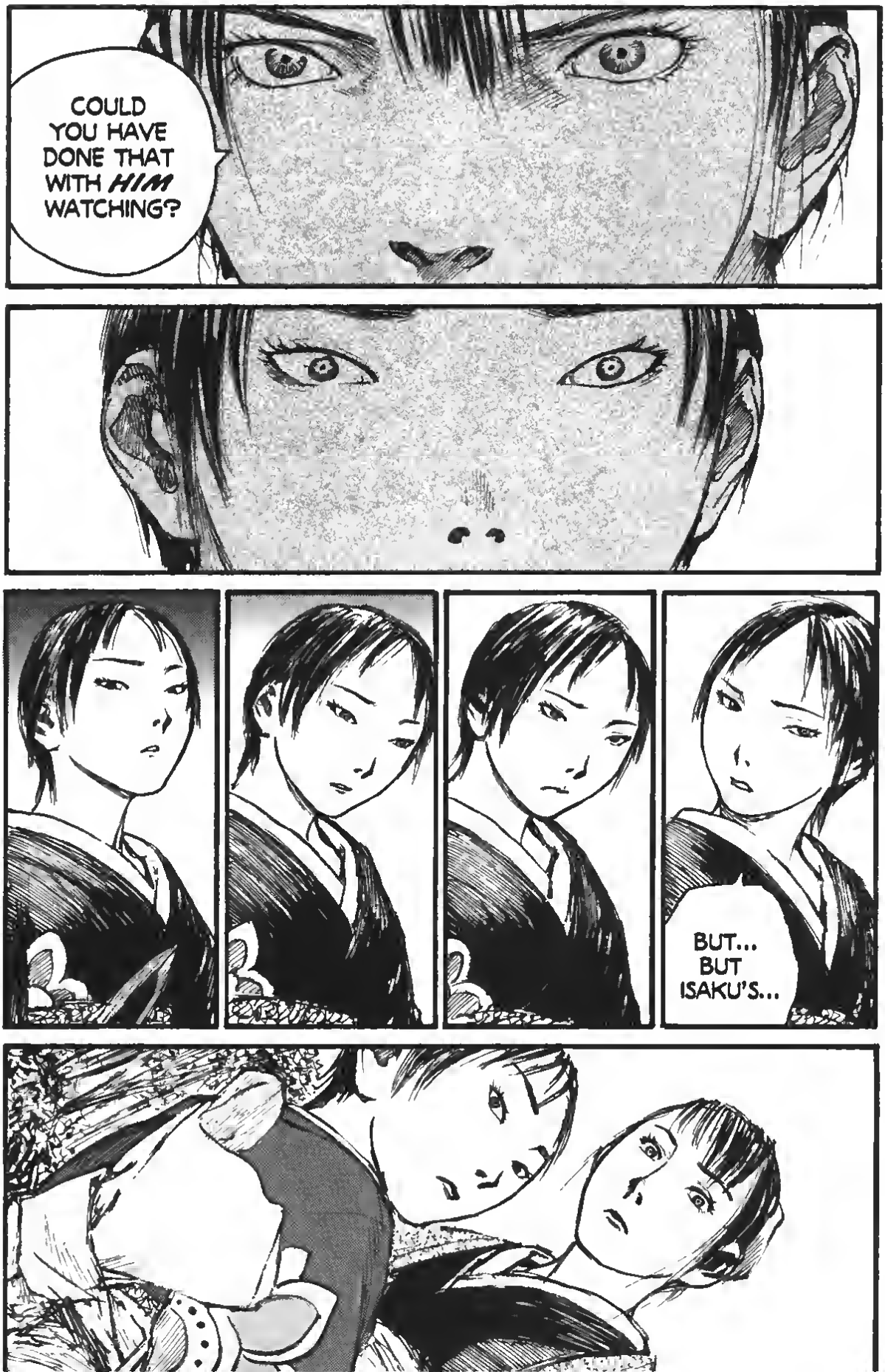
HE'S AN AMAZ-ING MAN!!
I...
...I'VE HAD SO MANY EXPERIENCES WITH THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
SO MANY, MANY KINDS...
...AND ALMOST ALL OF THEM...
...THINGS I WISH I COULD FORGET.

DŌA. TO YOU, ITTŌ-RYŪ MAY MAKE SPLENDID COMRADES...
...ANOTSU KAGEHISA, A HIGH-MINDED PATRIOT...
...AND THAT'S FINE. I WON'T SAY ANY-THING.
MY STORY IS SO... SO OLD.
SO OLD YOU NEVER EVEN HEARD ABOUT IT.

...IF YOU ARE... THINK.
BUT...
DŌA. I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE ITTŌ-RYŪ.


WHAT YOU JUST DID?
READY TO KILL UNARMED ...

...UNRESISTING PEOPLE? FROM BEHIND?


COULD YOU HAVE DONE THAT WITH *HIM* WATCHING?
BUT... BUT ISAKU'S...

H-
H-
HERE...

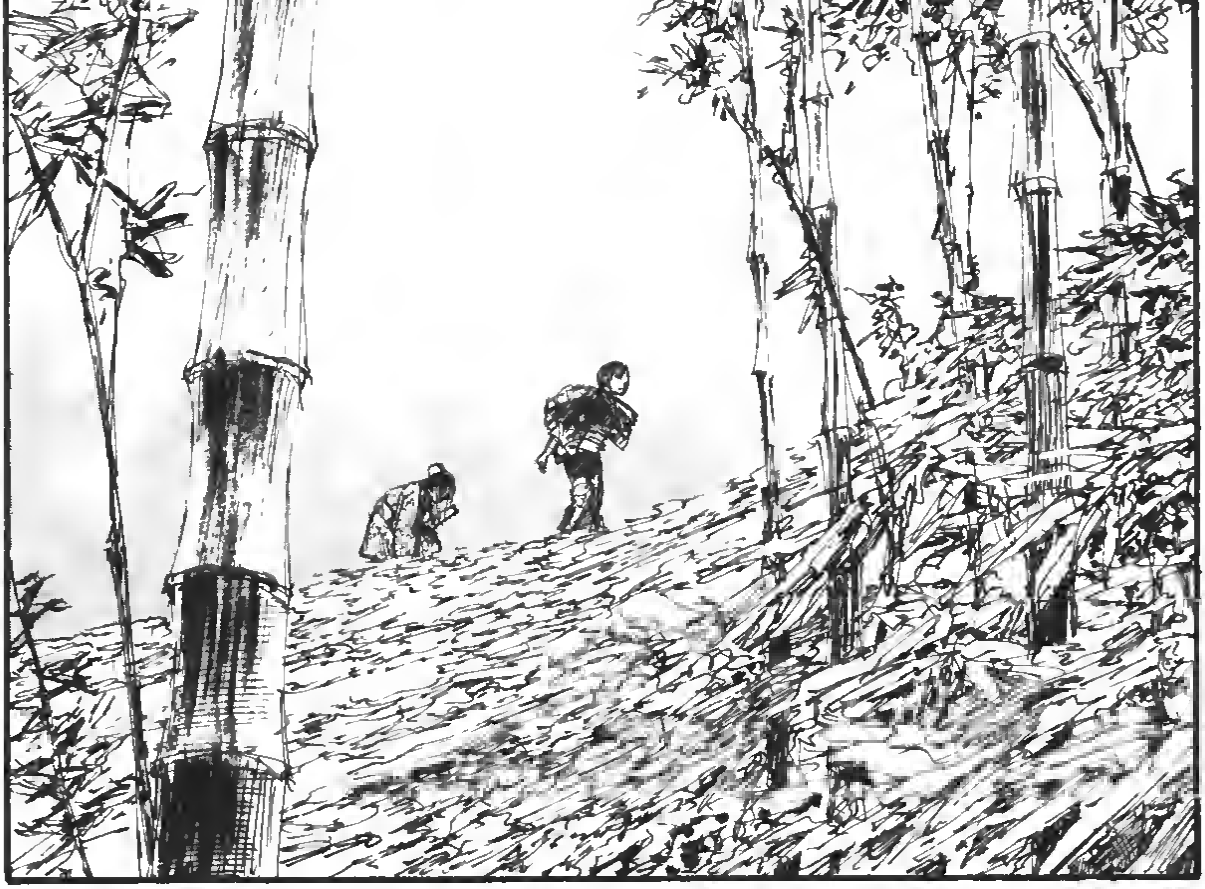
TELL
ME.

THESE ARM
GUARDS.
WHERE...?
W-WARN'T
US, MA'AM.
THEM
OFFICIALS--

OFFI-CIALS?!
YOU DIDN'T STRIP THEM?!
O-O-OVER THAR', MA'AM...
GOT 'EM FROM THE BADGER HOLE GUARDS.
DEEP IN THET BAMBOO.
"BADGER HOLE"...?
...BUT IT'S THERE! GOIN' DEEP LIKE A BADGER LAIR...
WE JES' CALLS IT THAT, MA'AM, BUT...

...DON'T GOT A CLUE WHERE IT GO, UH-UHN!
BUT, LISSEN! TWO, THREE TIMES A DAY? THEM DOORS OPEN...
...AN' CORPSES COME OUT! CORPSES!
IT'S OUR JOB T'CARRY 'EM FAR AS THE RIVER.
OFFICIALS SAID THEY'S GONNA CREMATE 'EM...
...BUT JES' LOOK AT 'EM!
WHEN'S THEY GONNA BURY 'EM NOW?
THOSE ARM THINGS? A SAMURAI SAYS...
..."GUY THEY BROUGHT IN WORED 'EM.
"KEEP 'EM FOR A SOUVENIER."

WHEN WAS THAT?!
EH? EH?!
MAY... MAYBE TEN DAYS AGO...?
DŌA...



"WE WAIT BY THE BADGER HOLE AFTER EIGHT...AN' THE BODIES COME OUT.

"IF THERE'S MORE COMIN'...
"...THEY SAY COME BACK AT TWO...

"...AN' SOMETIMES WE GO THREE TIMES A DAY..."

RIN. LET'S GO HOME AND GET READY.
EH? READY FOR WHAT?
TWO INSIDE. NO... THERE'RE MORE.
TO WASTE THEM! THE NEXT TIME THEY OPEN THE GRATING!
DON'T BE STUPID!
WHO'D YOU CALL STUPID?!
OUCH! OUCH! JUST...CALM DOWN!
AND KEEP QUIET!
LOOK, DŌA. THINK A MOMENT.
WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT TUNNEL GOES?

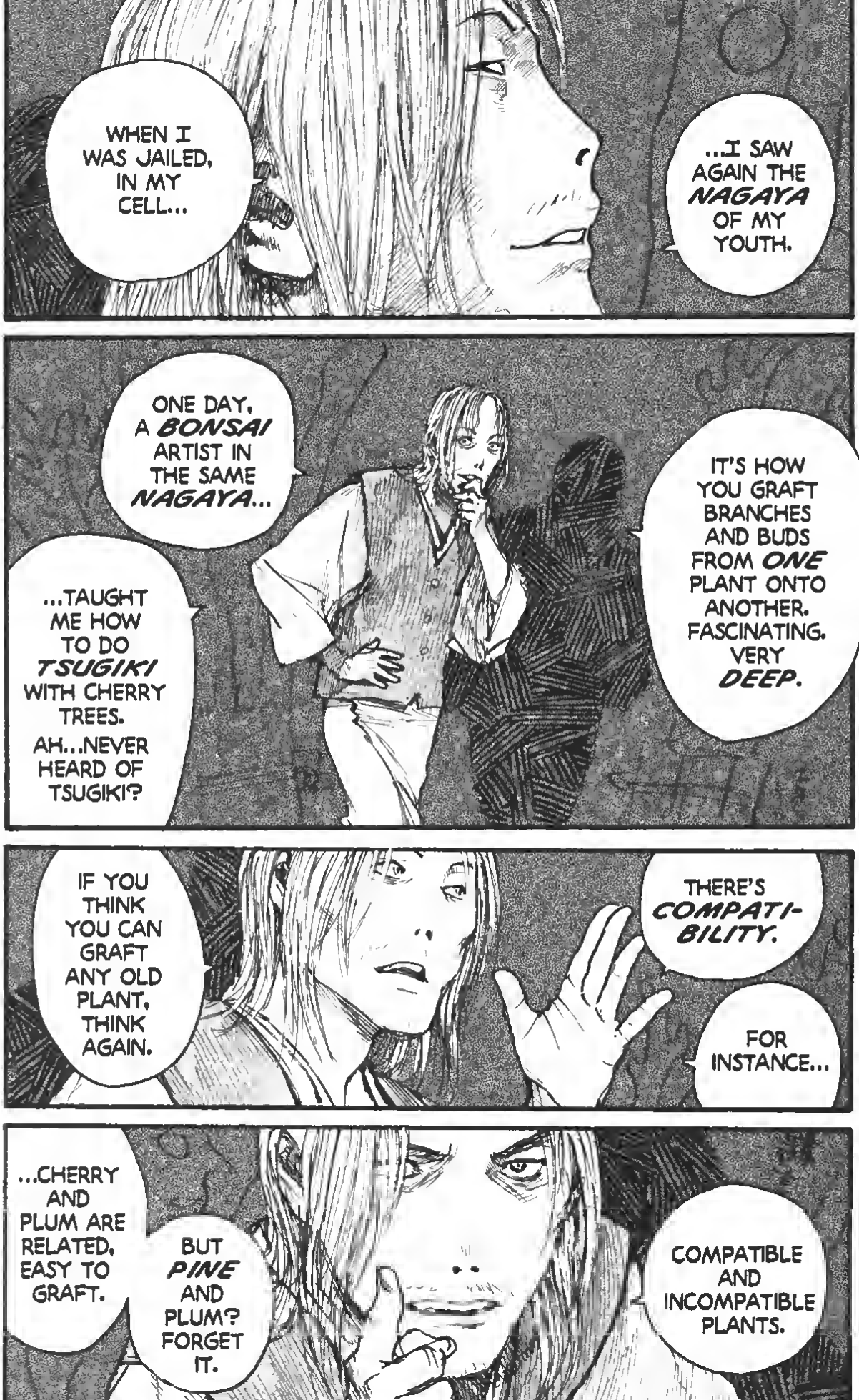
ME?
I THINK IT'S A BACK DOOR INTO EDO CASTLE.
IF IT IS, EVERY-THING DOVETAILS.
EVEN WHAT KASHIN KOJI SAID!
IMMOR-TALITY EXPERIMENTS?
THE SAN-MAWARI ARRESTING FOLK AND DRAGGING THEM IN? GUINEA PIGS!
AND SOME PERCENT... DIE.
ALL THOSE NAMELESS CORPSES...?
TAKE THEM OUT THE MAIN GATES, THE HATAMOTO GET ANTSY.

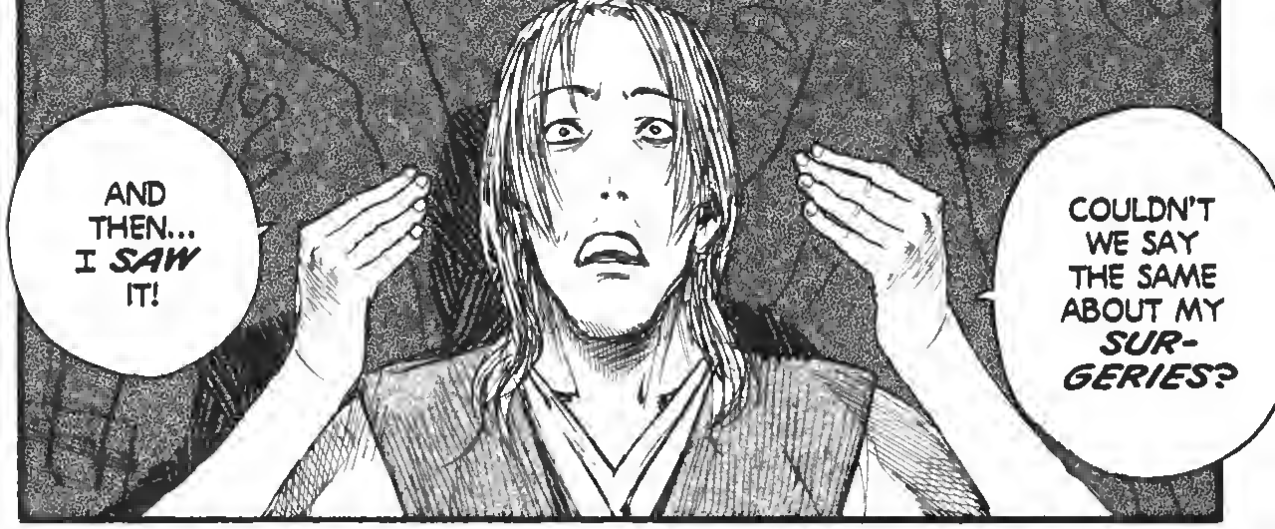
SO THEY USE THIS TUNNEL TO DUMP THEM.
IT'S A GO-FUJŌ-MON!
SO THAT'S PERFECT, RIGHT? WE BYPASS THE MAIN GATES...
...WHAT'S EASIER THAN THAT?
JUST THE OPPO-SITE.
LIKE THAT ENTRANCE GRATE.
THERE MAY BE LOTS OF THEM.
SINCE IT'S SO WEAK ON THE OUTSIDE, THE DEFENSES INSIDE'LL BE INCREDIBLE.
AND EVEN IF WE CLEAR THEM ALL...
...WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?

WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT EDO CASTLE.
RIN! YOU'RE SO USE-LESS!
BITCH, BITCH, BITCH! IT'S ALL YOU DO!
I... UHM... WELL, WE HAVE TO, SORTA, YOU KNOW...
SO... HOW SHOULD WE DO IT?
AND ALL THE WHILE, ISAKU'S...

HN? WHAT'S WRONG?
... ... AHHN?
I THINK... MAYBE... WE CAN.
HUH?!

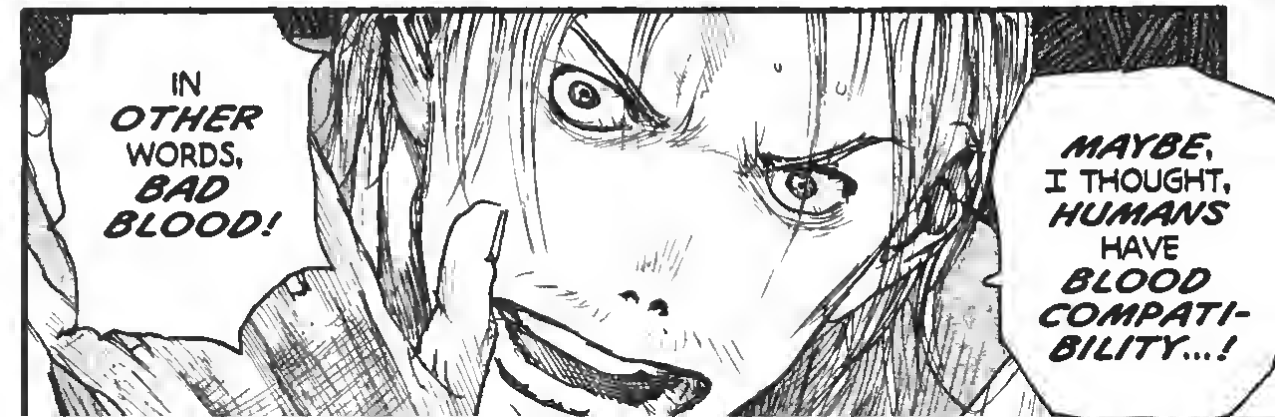
YUP...
IT'LL
WORK.


WHEN I WAS JAILED, IN MY CELL...
...I SAW AGAIN THE NAGAYA OF MY YOUTH.
ONE DAY, A BONSAI ARTIST IN THE SAME NAGAYA...
...TAUGHT ME HOW TO DO TSUGIKI WITH CHERRY TREES.
AH...NEVER HEARD OF TSUGIKI?
IT'S HOW YOU GRAFT BRANCHES AND BUDS FROM ONE PLANT ONTO ANOTHER. FASCINATING. VERY DEEP.
IF YOU THINK YOU CAN GRAFT ANY OLD PLANT, THINK AGAIN.
THERE'S COMPATI-BILITY.
FOR INSTANCE...
...CHERRY AND PLUM ARE RELATED, EASY TO GRAFT.
BUT PINE AND PLUM? FORGET IT.
COMPATIBLE AND INCOMPATIBLE PLANTS.


AND THEN... I SAW IT!
COULDN'T WE SAY THE SAME ABOUT MY SURGERIES?

THE FIVE MEN AFTER DEWA DIED.
IF THE PROCEDURE WAS THE SAME, THEN WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?!
PLEASE THINK BACK. RECALL HOW THEY PERISHED...

THE BLOOD IN THEIR BODIES COAGULATED! EVERYWHERE!
AND AS A RESULT, ROTTING LIMBS. FAILED HEARTS AND LUNGS!
BECAUSE MANJI'S BLOOD MIXED WITH THEIRS!


IN OTHER WORDS, BAD BLOOD!
MAYBE, I THOUGHT, HUMANS HAVE BLOOD COMPATIBILITY...!

AND SO, I RECON-SIDERED.
THE TOP PRIORITY *WASN'T* SURGERY. IT WAS MATCHING *BLOOD*.
BEFORE, WHEN I KILLED THOSE FIVE FELONS...
...I WAS *PARA-LYZED* BY FEAR... OF THE *FUTURE*.
BUT THINK-ING BACK...
... *ANY-ONE* COULD GET FIVE WITH BAD BLOOD.
WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM FIVE?
YOU NEED *MORE!* *MORE* AND *MORE* AND *MORE!!*

"LIKE SIFTING GOLD DUST FROM THE MUCK!"

...NNGN...
AH...?! HABAKI-DONO!
IT'S FINE. SIT.
.....
.....
.....
I'M AN ORDER-LY, AND I STILL--
THAT'S AMAZ-ING...
NO. I'M USED TO IT.
ALL THESE GUTS... THE SMELL...?
SIR... DOESN'T IT AFFECT YOU?

TORAEMON. DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY TYPES OF DEATH PENALTIES THERE WERE...
...IN CHINA?
EH... EH?!
PAR- DON?!
CH- CHINA, SIR? PENAL- TIES?
MM!
THEY SAY THE CONTI- NENTALS ARE CRUEL.
SO, AT LEAST... TEN?
HMPH.
TRUE. IN THE AGE OF WARRING STATES BEFORE THE HAN DYNASTY... AND IN THE THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD...
...THERE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN CRUEL PUNISHMENTS. BOILING ALIVE. PICKLING IN SALT.
MEN GROW SAVAGE IN TIMES OF WAR AND DISORDER. IN OUR LAND AS WELL.

BUT IN THE DAYS OF THE HAN, FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS, RECORDS SPEAK OF ONLY TWO.
BEHEADING... AND A STROKE FROM THE SIDE. THAT'S ALL.
JUST TWO, SIR...?
NOW IF YOU WANT CRUELTY, THE PUNISHMENTS OF TAISEI ARE CRUELER, BY FAR.
DRAWN AND QUARTERED WITH HORSES. CUT OPEN AND FED TO THE BIRDS ALIVE.
THEY'VE PERFECTED SO MANY HORRENDOUS DEATHS, YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE THEIR CREATIVITY.
AND THAT'S NOT ALL. THEY HANG THE CORPSES AT STREET CORNERS, UNTIL THEY ROT THROUGH AND FALL...
.....
.....
.....
HEH HEH! TRUTH BE TOLD, I'M JUST REPEATING WHAT BURANDO TOLD ME.
BUT RIGHT AT THE END, HE SAID SOMETHING INTRIGUING...
...DAMN HIS HIDE.

THAT CRUEL-TY GAP, HE SAID...
...IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEIR MEDICINE AND OURS.
IN THE NAME OF THE LAW, THEY TEAR PEOPLE LIMB FROM LIMB.
SKIN THEM. OPEN THEIR GUTS TO THE SUN.
COUNT-LESS PEOPLE SEE THAT. THE MASSES.
AND THAT KNOWLEDGE OF THE BODY, WELL...
...THAT, HE SAID, IS THE WELLSPRING OF RANPŌ.
EH HEH HEH!

AND YOU MEAN TO *PROVE IT* RIGHT HERE.
DON'T YOU, BURANDO?
W-*WAIT*, SIR. MY LEGS, THEY--
GET *OVER* HERE! *NOW!*
CAN'T WORK 'EM, SIR. HONEST!
WHAT DO WE DO?
P-PLEASE, SIR...
CAN'T MOVE HIS LEGS, DOESN'T *HAVE* LEGS, DOESN'T *MATTER!*

DAMN YOU! STAND UP!!
AHHH!!
WAI-- OWW! IT HURTS!
.....
.....
.....
IN HIS PLACE.
UH... UHM... I... I CAN GO.
WHAT...?!
NO NEED TO TAKE... A SICK MAN.
IF... IF I'M OKAY, I'LL...

..I SEE...
WELL, TIME'S OF THE ESSENCE.
ARE YOU NUTS?
DON'T DO IT!
.....
.....
.....
KLANG
TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH:
BAREFOOT
Part 5 of 5

As the horrific "Barefoot" story arc comes to a close, Kagimura's prisoners are getting restless, and Burando continues to accelerate the pace of his deadly experiments. Burando's a new man, operating with renewed vigor, Manji's a sliver of his former self, and Dōa helps Rin steal something that may be extremely vital to their rescue mission. *Blade of the Immortal* #126 also features the final image in Hiroaki Samura's "China Cat" pinup series *and* a full color Manji pinup by **Guy Davis** (*B.P.R.D.*, *The Marquis*, *The Nevermen*, and much more)!!

GLOSSARY

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*

Banshū: Officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself.

Bonsai: Stunted, miniature trees, created by restricting their growth.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts, here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Dono: Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of a higher rank.

Dōshin: Low ranking police officers.

Edo: Capital of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Fujōmon: A side gate for carrying out the dead. Corpses were considered unclean.

Hatamoto: An inner circle of feudal lords.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Nagaya: Literally "long houses," *nagaya* were the commoner's residences of old Edo, long, single-story buildings divided up into small apartments.

Ranpō: Dutch medicine. A generic term for Western medical science, since most Western knowledge entered through the Dutch trading zone in Nagasaki.

Ryū: A sword school.

Sanmawari: Also known as "the three patrols," the *sanmawari* were three groups of *dōshin* who performed specific patrol and criminal investigation duties.

Taisei: Europe.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

Makie by Hiroaki Samura—from a series of pinups in which he put *Blade of the Immortal* characters in Chinese dresses. We'll have his final "China Cats" pinup next issue!

LETTERS

Send letters and fan art to:

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS,
10956 SE MAIN STREET, MILWAUKIE, OREGON 97222

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BACK COVER BY ELVIN HERNÁNDEZ!

I met Elvin at a convention in Texas recently and encouraged him to send in a pinup. Mr. Hernández just finished drawing the third issue of *Superbia*, created by Matt Kubinski. Thanks, Elvin—and keep in touch!

SPOTLIGHT ON JHOMAR SORIANO!

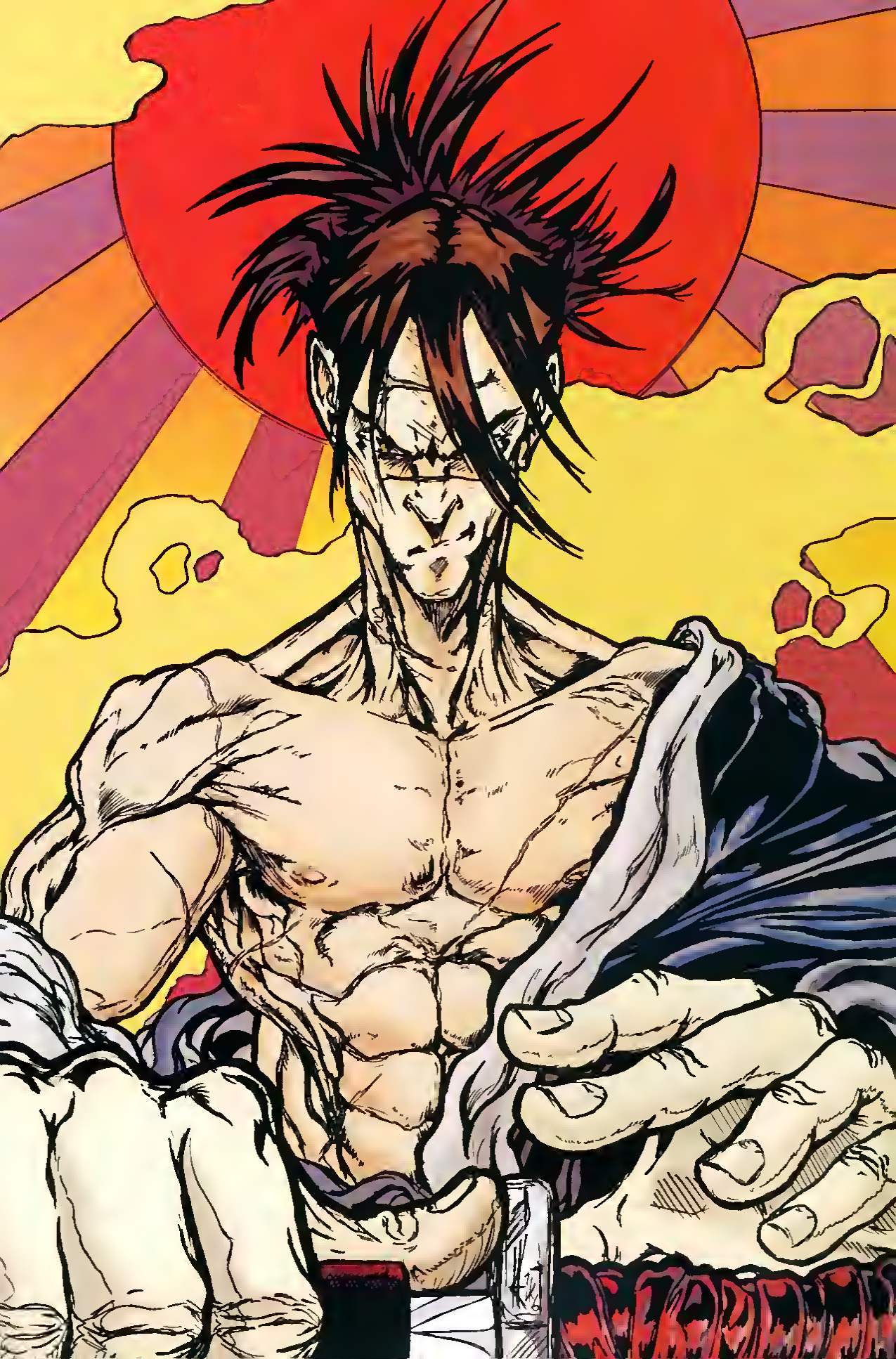
Jhomar is known by *Blade* fans for his "Rumble to Kaga" and "Dn the Evils Under Edo" strips, which have been solid parodies of *Blade of the Immortal* story arcs, running sporadically in this lettercol over the past few years. Mr. Soriano has been doing a lot of comics and illustration work in the Philippines, but he still finds the time to send us *Blade* parody strips and extras—much to our delight! Here's Jhomar showing off a different drawing style, as he catches Dōa in a pensive, thoughtful moment. We also have the DEBUT appearance of Jhomar's new strip, "Takezo." Jhomar says, "My idea there was just to show Miyamoto Musashi as a kid, hence his old name, but already with the lethal skill and mindset of his adulthood." Thanks, Jhomar! (Stay tuned for more of his work!) Next month: Full Color Pinup by Guy Davis!! Then in July: Full Color Pinup by Farel Dalrymple!!

—Philip Simon, editor

TAKEZO
WITH A SHINKEN IN HIS RIGHT HAND AND AN IAITO IN THE LEFT, OUR BRILLIANT TOSHU FROM MIYAMOTO, TAKEZO, WILL DISPLAY IN GRAPHIC DETAIL THE DIFFERENCE OF THE TWO HONORED SWORDS IN ACTUAL COMBAT
LOOK AT HOW MY SHINKEN CUTS THROUGH THIS YOSHIOKA SAMURAI--
--LIKE A BOAT SLICING THROUGH THE SUMIDA
SCHOK
NOW, WITH THE IAITO ON MY LEFT AND USING THE SAME SAMURAI, I'LL SLASH LIKE SO .
SCHOK
SEE? THE IAITO SNAPS AFTER CUTTING THROUGH THE BODY AND COULD NOT COMPARE WITH MY SHINKEN'S DENSITY
I COULDN'T CARE LESS.

TAKEZO © 2007 by Jhomar Soriano.

Dōa by Jhomar Soriano, Quezon City, Philippines.



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